United Nations A/C.5/54/SR.41

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
17 January 2000

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 41st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 3 December 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Tribute to the memory of Adrien Teirlink, former representative of Belgium in the Fifth Committee and Chairman of the Committee at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly

Agenda item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.27 concerning agenda item 47

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.24/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 47

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.6/54/L.7/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 155

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 76 (f)

Organization of work

Other matters

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

99-82616 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of Adrien Teirlink, former representative of Belgium in the Fifth Committee and Chairman of the Committee at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly

1. **The Chairman** and **Mr. van de Velde** (Belgium) paid tribute to the memory of Adrien Teirlink.

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.

Agenda item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.27 concerning agenda item 47 (A/C.5/54/32 and Corr.1)

3. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had considered the Secretary-General's statement of the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.27 (A/C.5/54/32). Its comments thereon would be issued as an official document of the General Assembly.

4. Under the terms of paragraph 14 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would authorize the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) from 1 January to 31 December 2000. The calendar for implementation agreed upon by the parties to the agreements signed in December 1996 consisted of three consecutive phases. The third phase, from 1998 to 2000, covered further development in the implementation of the outcome of the various commissions, and promotion of broad administrative and legislative reform.

5. The Secretary-General had expressed satisfaction with the current configuration of MINUGUA. Accordingly, only a modest change in the Mission's regional structure was proposed in 2000, involving the closure of three sub-offices, and the establishment of a third mobile office, which would increase the Mission's flexibility in the field.

6. The General Assembly had approved a total appropriation for MINUGUA of $59,222,800 under section 3 (Peacekeeping operations and special missions) of the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/6/Rev.1). Expenditures during the same period were estimated at $56,347,500, resulting in an estimated unencumbered balance of $2,875,300. A preliminary performance report for that period was contained in annex V to the statement. The Advisory Committee considered that the performance report should have been more detailed and that the budget submission would have been enhanced by the provision of data allowing better annual comparisons and clarification of the variances among budget submissions.

7. Regarding the use of extrabudgetary resources, he said that expenditures charged to the Trust Fund for the Guatemala peace process during the biennium 1998-1999 were estimated at $7,320,600. Estimated requirements for the continuation in 2000 of the projects financed through the Trust Fund amounted to $3,669,900 on the basis of contributions already approved by donors and those currently under negotiation. The Advisory Committee had been informed, upon enquiry, that, as at December 1999, the total income of the Trust Fund since its establishment stood at $15,085,600. Expenditure was projected at $14,119,100.

8. The estimated costs of the extension of the mandate of MINUGUA from 1 January to 31 December 2000 amounted to $27,694,300. That provision would support requirements for 20 military liaison officers, 51 civilian police observers, and 123 international and 237 local staff. The only adjustment in that connection was the reduction of seven international General Service staff, offset by an increase of five local level General Service staff. International staff costs assumed a vacancy rate of 10 per cent, while a vacancy factor of 5 per cent was applied to local staff costs. The Advisory Committee noted that 75 out of 82 staff in the Professional category were mission appointees and therefore required no post adjustment. A total of 98 United Nations Volunteers would continue to be assigned to MINUGUA. The Advisory Committee had been informed that the increase in common staff costs from $175 per person per month in the previous submission to $290 per person per month for 2000 reflected the conversion to appointment under the 100 series of the Staff Rules of a number of local staff who had reached the four-year limit for employment under the 300 series of the Staff Rules.

9. With respect to the costs for premises and accommodation, he said that the provisions of $708,300 for rental of premises were based on 1999 actual rental costs and included, for some contracts, an estimated increase of 10 per cent in accordance with the terms of the leases for 2000, offset by a decrease in rents resulting from the closure of three regional sub-offices.

10. An amount of $1,980,300 had been requested for air operations, compared with $1,672,800 in 1999. The increase resulted from the need for additional flight hours for both the helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft in order to monitor areas that were difficult to access by land. The monthly hire costs and the number of block hours and additional hours for both types of aircraft were shown in annex II.A to the statement.

11. There had been a reduction in the estimates under communications from $841,100 in 1999 to $490,800 in 2000, which was due to the fact that the 1999 figure had provided for the replacement of old and obsolete communications equipment, whereas no resources had been requested for non-recurrent costs in 2000. The estimates under other equipment had decreased from $517,800 in 1999 to $223,600 in 2000.

12. The estimate of $813,900 under transport operations included an amount of $155,300 for the replacement of 10 4x4 vehicles that had exceeded their normal life expectancy. Provisions of $324,700 were made for spare parts, repairs and maintenance for the vehicle fleet, reflecting a decrease based on experience in the estimated monthly cost from $29,690 in 1999 to $27,060 in 2000. The cost of petrol, oil and lubricants was estimated at $296,100, based on the assumption that fuel prices would rise by 10 per cent in 2000.

13. A new provision of $27,700 was proposed under public information programmes for the conduct of seminars for staff members, including military liaison officers, civilian police observers and United Nations Volunteers, covering the historical background of Guatemala, economic, social and political environment issues and current and past difficulties and experiences, and sensitivity training. The Mission considered that those seminars were critical in order to maximize the efforts of staff, primarily in the verification areas.

14. Should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution, the requirements of $27,694,300 would be charged against the provision of $90,387,200 for special political missions requested in section 3 (Political affairs) of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. The Advisory Committee did not recommend any reduction in the estimates proposed. It had been informed that no provision had been made for liquidation costs in the estimated requirements for 2000 because of the uncertainties affecting the political situation, and that the Secretary-General would be more ready to discuss the issue towards the middle of 2000, when more information would be available on the course of the peace process.

15. **Ms. Castellanos-González** (Guatemala) said that her delegation supported unconditionally the renewal of the mandate of MINUGUA, which had been expanded, following the signing in December 1996 of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace, to include verification of all the signed agreements. MINUGUA had contributed to building trust among the parties to those agreements, and its work had been exemplary. Its presence would be crucial for ensuring further progress in the peace process. Indeed, much remained to be done. The good offices of the United Nations would remain indispensable for as long the Agreement on the Implementation, Compliance and Verification Timetable for the Peace Agreements was in effect, and it was vital that the Mission should have the resources necessary to enable it to discharge its mandate.

16. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America), noting that the United States was a member of the Group of Friends of the Guatemalan peace process, said that her delegation strongly supported the renewal of the mandate of MINUGUA. It wished to have clarification, however, regarding the application of the 300 series of the Staff Rules and, in particular, the conversion of a number of local staff employed under those rules to appointment under the 100 series of the Staff Rules. It noted with concern that average monthly rental costs for the regional offices had risen from $12,400 in 1999 to $17,112 in 2000. Given that the Mission's mandate had been extended for only one year, her delegation questioned the need for the purchase of 10 new vehicles, 20 desktop computers and 20 laser printers, which should, in its view, have been replaced internally.

17. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that, given the duration of the Mission, a number of staff had reached the four-year limit for employment under the 300 series of the Staff Rules. Those staff had received a simplified remuneration package, without the standard benefits

Therefore, their conversion to appointment under the 100 series of the Staff Rules would inevitably entail additional costs for the Organization. MINUGUA vehicles were called on to operate in difficult terrain and were subjected to heavy wear and tear. Thus, the request for resources to replace 10 vehicles out of a fleet of 229 was not unreasonable. The acquisition of new data-processing equipment was vital for the continued operation of the Mission in 2000. The increase in the Organization's peacekeeping activities meant that there was no spare capacity in those areas and thus neither the vehicles nor the computers and printers could be replaced internally. The increase in the rental costs of the regional offices was based on the terms of the lease agreements and was not excessive. The estimates for 2000 had been prepared with the need for economy very much in mind. Indeed, the provision for 2000 compared favourably with the rates of expenditure projected for 1998 and 1999. The expenses queried by the representative of the United States were simply unavoidable.

18. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that his delegation strongly supported MINUGUA and was committed to the effective implementation of its mandate. It wished to propose, however, that action on the statement of programme budget implications should be deferred until the Committee had before it two other statements of programme budget implications that had yet to be issued. His delegation would not oppose the introduction of the three remaining statements of programme budget implications scheduled for consideration at the current meeting, but it was of the view that the Committee should not take action until it was able to consider all six statements of programme budget implications due to come before the Committee simultaneously in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

19. **Mr. Den Hartog** (Brazil) expressed support for the activities of MINUGUA, which were of vital importance to his region. His delegation had hoped that the Committee would take action on the statement of programme budget implications at the current meeting. It had doubts as to the practicability of the proposal by the representative of Canada, given that additional draft resolutions with programme budget implications might emerge subsequently, but it was prepared to be flexible.

20. **Ms. Castellanos-González** (Guatemala) said that, in view of the Committee's heavy workload, she saw no reason to postpone a decision on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.27. It was important not to delay the adoption of that draft resolution. The Committee could take decisions on the remaining programme budget implications the following week, as a matter of priority.

21. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) and **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) said that they had no objection to taking a decision immediately on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.27.

22. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should decide to inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/54/L.27, the requirements of $27,694,300 would be charged against the provision of $90,387,200 for special political missions requested in section 3 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

23. *It was so decided.*

24. **The Chairman** said that, in the light of the comment by the representative of Canada, the Committee would hear the introduction of but would defer taking action on the three remaining statements of programme budget implications scheduled for consideration at the current meeting until the two outstanding statements of programme budget implications had been issued.

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.24/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 47 (A/C.5/54/34)

25. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), orally presenting the Advisory Committee's report on the Secretary-General's statement of the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.24/Rev.1 (A/C.5/54/34), said that the programme budget implications arose from a continuation of the arrangements already authorized by the General Assembly for the support of the Central American peace process through 1999. As indicated in paragraph 8 of the statement, should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution, that would require the continuation in 2000 of the provision of related resources equivalent to one staff member at the P-4 level for a Political Affairs Officer, and one staff member at the General Service level. Total staff costs amounted to $187,700 and would be charged against the provision of $90.4 million for special political

missions requested in section 3 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. The Advisory Committee concurred in the Secretary-General's estimate.

26. On the question of the procedure for discussing draft resolutions with programme budget implications, the Fifth Committee could defer consideration of estimates while allowing the plenary Assembly to adopt the related draft resolutions. For the Committee to proceed on the basis that all statements of programme budget implications should be discussed together might create difficulties for the General Assembly in scheduling the adoption of resolutions recommended by other committees.

27. **The Chairman** said that she was mindful of that procedure and would take it into account in her forthcoming meeting with the President of the General Assembly to discuss the scheduling of decisions on draft resolutions.

28. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) recalled that the previous year the Assembly had approved an amount of some $350,000 for the support of the Central American peace process and that, as of April 1999, only about $166,000 had been spent. She requested clarification of the reason for the significant underexpenditure.

29. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that in the forthcoming second performance report for the biennium 1998-1999 it was anticipated that, for the biennium, the amounts expended would be below those appropriated for the Central American peace process because the particular staff member assigned had been at the P-3 rather than the P-4 level for that period, and there had also been a short period when there had been a vacancy. That situation was not expected to continue during 2000.

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.6/54/L.7/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 155 (A/C.5/54/35)

30. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), orally presenting the Advisory Committee's report on the Secretary-General's statement of the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.6/54/L.7/Rev.1 (A/C.5/54/35), said that the draft resolution adopted by the Sixth Committee called on the General Assembly to decide, without prejudice to any future decision, that the next session of the International Law Commission would be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 1 May to 9 June and from 10 July to 18 August 2000.

31. The Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should be informed that, should it adopt draft resolution A/C.6/54/L.7/Rev.1, additional expenditure of $105,200 would arise under section 8 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, to be considered in the context of the procedures for the use and operation of the contingency fund.

32. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) said that her delegation found it difficult to believe that $105,200 could not be found by the Secretariat from elsewhere in the budget. She noted that the budget of the Office of Legal Affairs was some $33 million for the biennium and that there had been significant underexpenditure in the current biennium which was not reflected in the proposed programme budget of 2000-2001. Her delegation could therefore not accept the request for an additional amount for the session of the International Law Commission. She understood, moreover, that the Commission had taken a decision that one week out of each half of the session would be devoted to meetings of a drafting committee; that would give rise to a saving that was not reflected in the Secretary-General's statement.

33. **Mr. Elgammal** (Egypt) asked whether it was intended that the splitting of the session of the International Law Commission should be for 2000 only, or whether it was to be a permanent arrangement.

34. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the draft resolution indicated that the decision to hold a split session of the International Law Commission would be without prejudice to any future decision on the matter. His reading was that the arrangement was intended to apply to 2000 only.

35. In reply to the representative of the United States of America, he said that the budget estimates were based on the minimum requirements for carrying out the programme of work. Splitting the session therefore represented an additional cost. The level of expenditure under section 6 (Legal affairs) in the biennium 1998-1999 represented 96.9 per cent of the amount budgeted. The underspend had been mostly due to a vacancy situation within the Office of Legal Affairs which

could not be expected to continue into the next biennium. It would therefore be prudent to make provision for the additional cost relating to the split session, particularly as the estimate represented only 80 per cent of the full cost of travel and per diem for members of the Commission, on the assumption that some members would not be present the whole time. That made it harder to absorb additional costs.

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1 concerning agenda item 76 (f) (A/C.5/54/31 and Add.1)

36. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), orally presenting the Advisory Committee's report on the Secretary-General's statement of the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1 (A/C.5/54/31) and on the related observations of the Committee on Conferences (A/C.5/54/31/Add.1), said that, under the terms of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would, *inter alia*, decide to convene the United Nations conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects in June/July 2001 and to establish a preparatory committee, which would hold no less than three sessions, the first of which would be in New York from 28 February to 3 March 2000. The preparatory committee would decide, at its first session, on the date and venue of the conference in 2001, as well as on the dates and venues of its subsequent sessions, and would make recommendations to the conference on all relevant matters, including the objective, a draft agenda, draft rules of procedure and draft final documents.

37. It was apparent from paragraph 9 of the statement by the Secretary-General that no provision had been made in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 for the convening of the international conference and its preparatory committee. Provisions for the related requirements would therefore have to be made under section 4 (Disarmament), section 2 (General Assembly affairs and conference services) and section 26 (Public information).

38. On the assumption that the three sessions of the preparatory committee and the conference itself would be convened in New York, conference-servicing requirements were estimated at $1,599,700. As provision for conference services was made under the relevant sections of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, no additional appropriation would be required under section 2. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 37/14, neither the conference nor its preparatory committee would be entitled to the provision of summary records, the cost of which was estimated at $448,900.

39. In the context of the potential for absorption of the conference-servicing costs of the preparatory committee and the conference, the Advisory Committee reiterated its comments contained in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, in which it had expressed its concern regarding the reduction in temporary assistance for meetings.

40. Non-conference-servicing requirements would comprise temporary assistance, consultancy services and information activities as described in paragraph 16 of the statement, and press coverage of the conference and its preparatory committee — the total estimated cost of which would be $338,500.

41. The Advisory Committee noted that it was planned to issue a press kit for the conference in English, French and Spanish and took the view that any such press kit should be made available in all the official languages of the United Nations. As no reply had been received from the Secretariat to the Committee's request for information on the costs associated with the production of the kits in Arabic, Chinese and Russian, ACABQ reiterated its request to the Secretariat to provide the information to the Fifth Committee.

42. The statement by the Secretary-General did not provide for the full cost of carrying out the activities envisaged in paragraphs 13 and 14 of the draft resolution, which called for implementation within available financial resources and with any other assistance provided by Member States in a position to do so. The Advisory Committee had previously noted the use of the phrase "within existing resources" in a number of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, and emphasized the responsibility of the Secretariat to provide comprehensive and accurate information to the Assembly about whether there were enough resources to implement a new activity. Such information should be provided to the Fifth Committee.

43. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution

A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1, an additional appropriation of at least $723,100 would be required under sections 4 (Disarmament) and 26 (Public information) of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Should the Assembly decide on the provision of summary records, an additional appropriation of $448,900 would be required under section 2 (General Assembly affairs and conference services). In addition, an amount of at least $56,500 would be required under section 32 (Staff assessment), to be offset by an equivalent amount under income section 1 (Income from staff assessment), for additional staff for the Department of Disarmament Affairs.

44. **Ms. Sun Minqin** (China) said that her delegation was very concerned at the statement in paragraph 16 of document A/C.5/54/31 that the press kit for the United Nations conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons would be issued only in English, French and Spanish, and agreed with the Advisory Committee that the press kit should be issued in all official languages. Her delegation hoped that the Secretariat would take the necessary measures to that effect.

45. **Mr. Takahara** (Japan) said that his delegation was fully aware of the importance of the United Nations conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, and of the great interest in that issue of affected countries and civil society, as described in paragraph 6 of document A/C.5/54/31/Add.1; his country was second to none in its commitment to the success of the conference. At the same time, it fully subscribed to the principle that conferences and meetings of the United Nations should be managed and administered in as cost-efficient a manner as possible. The arrangements for the conference should therefore conform to the guidelines established by the General Assembly.

46. **Ms. Zonicle** (Bahamas) said that the background to the decision concerning summary records mentioned in paragraph 11 of document A/C.5/54/31 was the need to control the volume of documentation before the Assembly and for the timely distribution of documentation in all the official languages, as well as the question of cost. Because of the importance of the conference and the threat posed to safety and security by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in many countries, including her own, her delegation felt that an exception should be made to the procedure established in General Assembly resolution 37/14 C. She would have preferred summary records to be prepared for all the sessions of the preparatory committee but, in a spirit of compromise, could support the second option considered by the Committee on Conferences (A/C.5/54/31/Add.1, para. 9), namely the preparation of summary records for the first and last sessions of the preparatory committee.

47. Her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of China concerning the importance of preparing the press kit in all the official languages of the Organization; it was also important to give substantive coverage of the conference on the United Nations web site. If it were decided to make an exception to the rule in view of the special importance of the conference, that decision would not undermine the general application of the rule itself.

48. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) said that her delegation supported the convening of the conference but was not in favour of making exceptions to the wise decisions that had been taken in the past concerning conference servicing. Her delegation did not believe that the need for summary records had been demonstrated and was therefore not in favour of granting an exception to the provisions of paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 37/14 C.

49. **Mr. Amolo** (Kenya) said that the illicit flow of small arms, especially in Africa, and the destabilizing and destructive effects of that phenomenon were a matter of great concern. The Secretary-General, in his April 1998 report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318), had identified the flow of illicit arms to and in Africa as one of the greatest challenges facing the international community. Accordingly, Kenya felt that all meetings of the preparatory committee for the conference should be provided with summary records. However, the discussions in the Committee on Conferences had led to a decision to compromise on that issue. Kenya therefore supported the suggestion that summary records should be provided for the first and last sessions of the preparatory committee. It also shared the Chinese delegation's view that press kits should be issued in all the official languages.

50. **Mr. Du Preez** (South Africa) said that the conference and the preparatory process were very important in addressing the issue of small arms, which was particularly important for Africa. Although

paragraph 9 of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1 requested the provision of summary records for the preparatory committee and the conference, as an exception to General Assembly resolution 37/14 C, paragraph 8, his delegation felt that summary records would not add much value to the end result of the conference, which would be the adoption of documents to serve as a basis for international efforts to address the problem. The conference would already cost an additional $723,000 without the provision of summary records, which would add nearly $450,000 to that amount. In addition, he was concerned about the request, contained in paragraph 14 (a) of the draft resolution, for a group of governmental experts to study the feasibility of restricting the manufacture and trade of small arms and light weapons to the manufacturers and dealers authorized by States. His delegation considered that the activities of that study group were parallel to the work of the preparatory committee. Since the proposed programme budget did not include any provision for the conference, the funds allocated to the study group should instead be allocated to the conference.

51. **Mr. Daka** (Zambia) said that he shared the views expressed by a number of delegations on the importance of the conference on small arms. He was flexible on the issue of summary records, but generally supported the statement made by the South African delegation. He also supported the Chinese delegation's request that the documentation for the conference should be issued in all the official languages.

52. **Mr. Abdalla** (Sudan) said that his delegation associated itself with all the delegations that had emphasized the importance of the conference. He endorsed the Chinese delegation's proposal that the press kit should be made available in all the official languages.

53. **Mr. Adam** (Israel) said that he shared the views of the United States delegation. Despite the great importance of the conference on small arms, it was only one of many important meetings and conferences to be held in the next few years on matters that included social affairs, the status of women and economic development. The provision of summary records for all the meetings of the conference would be too expensive.

54. **Ms. González Posse** (Argentina) said that she fully supported the convening of the conference. However, the information provided by the Secretariat did not clearly indicate what additional benefit would be derived from the provision of summary records. She therefore saw no reason to deviate from the provisions of General Assembly resolution 37/14 C, paragraph 8.

55. **Mr. Tesfaye** (Ethiopia) said that the problem of small arms was of paramount importance. He agreed with the representative of China that all summary records and press kits should be prepared in all the official languages. The growing tendency to provide summary records in only some of the official languages was a matter of concern.

56. **Ms. Zonicle** (Bahamas) said, with respect to the value of summary records, that the problem of small arms was very complex because it concerned not only security issues, but also the commercial interests involved in the manufacture and trade of small arms, and was highly controversial. The issue of landmines had been similarly complex and controversial. Since civil society had played a definitive role in that context, it should be given the same opportunity to help find effective solutions to the problem of small arms. The information provided to the Committee on Conferences had indicated that the preparatory committee would consider only procedural issues. However, it was clear, from the draft resolution and the statement of programme budget implications, that the preparatory committee would deal with substantive issues such as the programme of action and the objectives of the conference. In the negotiations on such complex issues, it was important that civil society should be given every opportunity to devise solutions that would ensure the successful implementation of the outcome of the conference.

57. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said he wished to add that the additional requirements for the conference would also be governed by the procedures for the use and operation of the contingency fund.

58. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the provision of press kits in Arabic, Chinese and Russian would cost $10,000 per language. Consequently, the production of press kits in all the official languages would increase the additional requirement of $723,100, indicated in paragraph 24 of document A/C.5/54/31, to $753,100, as the additional resources required under section 26 of the proposed

programme budget would increase from $338,500 to $368,500. The potential for absorption was addressed in paragraphs 20 and 21 of that document. Paragraph 19 indicated that non-conference-servicing requirements would amount to $1,025,100. However, as indicated in paragraph 20, the amount sought had been reduced by the $302,000 which had already been provided under the proposed programme budget for the meetings of the group of governmental experts, whose work related to the preparations for the conference. If the Fifth Committee decided not to grant a waiver for the provision of summary records, paragraph 9 of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1 would have to be amended to delete the request for summary records.

59. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) asked for more information on paragraph 20. In particular, she asked how the use of the $302,000 to finance the meetings of the preparatory committee would affect the meetings of the group of experts which had already been budgeted.

60. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that paragraph 4.21 of the proposed programme budget (A/54/6/Rev.1) contained a request for resources for the meetings of ad hoc expert groups, including the group of governmental experts to study the feasibility of restricting the manufacture and trade of small arms and light weapons to the manufacturers and dealers authorized by States. The work of that group was directly related to the preparatory work required for the success of the meetings foreseen in the draft resolution. Therefore, of the $1,025,100 referred to in paragraph 19 of document A/C.5/54/31, the amount of $302,000 had been provided for elsewhere and did not need to be reported to the General Assembly as a programme budget implication of the adoption of draft resolution A/C.1/54/L.42/Rev.1.

Organization of work

61. After a discussion in which a number of delegations took part, the **Chairman** said that the Committee secretariat would take into account the problems of small delegations and the needs of representatives observing Ramadan in revising the programme of work.

Other matters

62. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), responding to questions raised in earlier meetings by Costa Rica on the catering contract, canine services, security services and gifts to the Secretary-General and by Algeria on asbestos abatement, said that over the years the Secretariat had been consistent in its policy of not divulging the full details of contractual agreements to the Member States. The policy did not reflect a desire for concealment, since all contracts were scrutinized by the oversight bodies and awards were posted on the Internet, but rather an accommodation to the wishes of vendors to keep special terms and conditions from the knowledge of their other customers and their competitors. The perception that the United Nations did not respect established commercial custom could have serious repercussions on procurement. The Advisory Committee had examined the catering contract and discussed the quality of service and food in October. Nevertheless, in view of the concerns expressed, the Secretariat had decided to ask the United Nations Board of Auditors to review the contract.

63. With regard to security issues, he would like to remind the Committee that too detailed a discussion of security measures could compromise their effectiveness. On the specific question of canine services for bomb detection, the Secretariat had calculated, on the basis of the information obtained by the representative of Costa Rica from a company in Texas, which provided training only and not handling, that a self-run canine operation would cost at least $241,000 per year, whereas the out-sourced all-inclusive service currently used, provided by a vendor covered by comprehensive liability insurance, cost $156,000 per year. Although the figures clearly appeared to justify out-sourcing, the Secretariat had decided to ask the United Nations Board of Auditors to review the current contractual arrangements for canine services.

64. The United Nations Chief of Security was stationed in New York and was responsible for the safety and security of all representatives while present in the United Nations complex and all United Nations staff. He acted as a focal point on security matters for offices away from Headquarters and other duty stations. He traveled with the Secretary-General only when the assessed threat fully warranted enhanced security arrangements. Those measures had not changed in any way since the present Secretary-General had taken office.

65. In response to the questions raised by the representative of Costa Rica concerning gifts offered to the Secretary-General on behalf of the Organization, there was indeed a list of such gifts. No monetary value had been assigned, because the gifts represented the cultural heritage or artistic values of the respective Member States. Gifts were given with the understanding that their location on display or in storage was at the discretion of the United Nations, but their maintenance and upkeep were the responsibility of the donor States in accordance with the Financial Regulations and Rules.

66. In response to the questions about asbestos abatement raised by the delegation of Algeria, all buildings of the vintage of United Nations Headquarters used asbestos-containing materials for fireproofing or insulation. Under host country regulations, asbestos-containing materials that had not been disturbed and would not be disturbed by staff in the performance of their regular duties were considered encapsulated and hence safe.

67. There was no known or measured contamination in any area of the Headquarters buildings. Air quality inspections were performed regularly every six months and at the request of staff; none had revealed asbestos fibres in the air or water. There were no known cases of staff members being affected by illness related to asbestos, nor had there been any lawsuits pertaining to asbestos contamination at United Nations Headquarters.

68. The measures taken to protect staff from exposure to asbestos fibres were in conformity with industry standards and guidelines and included: air quality testing of representative spaces; regular inspections by Facilities Management staff and contractors of any disturbed asbestos and immediate abatement; air monitoring and asbestos abatement in any area where construction, renovation or maintenance activity might possibly disturb asbestos-containing materials; and retaining of a licensed contractor on call at two hours' notice for air-quality testing and asbestos isolation and abatement.

69. Abatement work was always performed by a licensed contractor in accordance with all regulatory requirements and did not require the staff to be evacuated. It was performed in the evenings after floor air circulation fans had been shut down. An enclosed plastic tent was constructed around the abatement area. The abatement work in the freight elevator lobby had been done in preparation for the installation of the drop-ceiling requested by the occupants of the thirty-ninth floor, namely, the secretariat of the Group of 77. Air quality tests had been performed before and after the work, and no asbestos particles had been detected in the air. Copies of the test reports had been provided to the Chairman of the Group of 77. The proposed long-term capital master plan called for removal of all asbestos-containing materials, which would entail relocation of staff from multiple floors. Environmental consultants had consistently found that the proper steps for testing and abatement were being taken.

70. **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) said that, although she thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for his information, many of her original questions remained unanswered. With regard to canine services, she had asked for a breakdown of the estimate of approximately $250,000 for a self-run operation. The price quoted by the firm in Texas had included both the purchase of the dogs and their training. She also wished to have an explanation of the 3.5 additional security officers needed in connection with canine services. Moreover, she would like to know whether the United Nations had the capacity to disarm a package bomb if one were discovered. With regard to other aspects of security services, she would appreciate information about the meeting that had been held in the United Nations in October with the New York City Police Department concerning car thefts, weapons and crime in general.

71. Her question had been directed not at gifts to the United Nations by Governments but gifts to the Secretary-General personally. Like any other official of the United Nations, the Secretary-General was not permitted to keep gifts that were given him in that capacity. She wanted to know what they were and where they were kept. With regard to the catering contract, she would yield the floor to her colleague, who had greater legal knowledge.

72. **Mr. Díaz Paniagua** (Costa Rica) said that his delegation felt that it was inappropriate for the Secretariat to have secrets from the Member States and to imply that the representatives could not keep commercial secrets confidential. He formally requested an opinion from the Legal Counsel on the basic legal grounds for not giving the Committee the information that had been requested and in general for keeping secrets from Member States.

73. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that he particularly appreciated having the Assistant Secretary-General's answers in written form, so that his delegation could determine at more leisure whether all its questions had been answered and perhaps obtain any subsequent clarification informally from central support services. He would like to receive a copy of the report prepared by the company that had done the study for the long-term capital master plan.

74. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) suggested that, in view of the important budgetary issues still on the Committee's agenda, delegations might perhaps follow the example of the Algerian delegation in obtaining clarification on housekeeping questions informally from central support services. Furthermore, the questions concerning gifts cast unwarranted aspersions on the Secretary-General, and her delegation did not wish to pursue such spurious subjects.

75. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that delegations had the right to request information on any questions of concern to them that were within the purview of the Fifth Committee.

76. **Ms. Incera** (Costa Rica) said that there must have been a problem with the interpretation, because she had never accused the Secretary-General of any impropriety or called his integrity into question. Her interest in the matter was to discover if there were any gifts that merited being made available for public viewing.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.